

ELEGANT EPISTLES.



VOL. III

ELEGANT EPICURE

FROM THE
MOST EMINENT
WRITERS;
I OOK THE THIRD
POPE AND HIS FRIENDS.

PART I



LONDON
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ELEGANT EPISTLES:

BEING A

COPIOUS SELECTION

OF

INSTRUCTIVE, MORAL, AND ENTERTAINING

LETTERS,

FROM THE MOST EMINENT

EPISTOLARY WRITERS.

—
VOLUME III.
—

BOOK V. VI.

MODERN OF LATE DATE.

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ELEGANT EPISTLES.

BOOK THE THIRD.

Modern of late Date.

COMPRISING POPE, HIS CONTEMPORARIES
AND FRIENDS.

PART I.

LETTER I.

MR. POPE TO MR. WYCHERLEY.

Blisfeld in Windsor Forest, Decr 26, 1704*.

IT was certainly a great satisfaction to me to see and converse with a man, whom in his writings I had so long known with pleasure; but it was a high addition to it, to hear you, at our very first meeting, doing justice to our dead friend Mr. Dryden. I was not so happy as to know him: *Virgilum tantum vidi*. Had I been born early enough, I must have known and loved him: for I have

* The author's age then sixteen.

been assured, not only by yourself, but by Mr. Congreve and sir William Trumbull, that his personal qualities were as amiable as his poetical, notwithstanding the many libellous misrepresentations of them, against which the former of these gentlemen has told me he will one day vindicate him*. I suppose those injuries were begun by the violence of party; but it is no doubt they were continued by envy at his success and fame. And those scribblers who attacked him in his latter times, were only like gnats in a summer's evening, which are never very troublesome but in the finest and most glorious season; but his fire, like the sun's, shined clearest towards its setting.

You must not therefore imagine, that when you told me my own performances were above those critics, I was so vain as to believe it: and yet I may not be so humble as to think myself quite below their notice. For critics, as they are birds of prey, have ever a natural inclination to carrion: and though such poor writers as I are but beggars, no beggar is so poor but he can keep a cur, and no author is so beggarly but he can keep a critic. I am far from thinking the attacks of such people either any honour or dishonour even to me, much less to Mr. Dryden. I agree with you, that whatever lesser wits have risen since his death, are but like stars appearing when the sun is set, that twinkle only in his absence, and with the rays they have borrowed from him. Our wit (as you call it) is but reflection or imitation, therefore scarce

* He since did so in his Dedication to to the Duke of Newcastle, prefixed to the duodecimo edition of Dryden's Plays, 1717.

to be called ours. True wit, I believe, may be defined a justness of thought and a facility of expression ; or, (in the midwife's phrase) a perfect conception, with an easy delivery. However, this is far from a complete definition. Pray help me to a better, as I doubt not you can. I am, &c.

LETTER II.

MR. POPE TO MR. WYCHERLEY.

March 25, 1705.

WHEN I write to you, I foresee a long letter, and ought to beg your patience beforehand ; for if it proves the longest, it will be of course the worst I have troubled you with. Yet, to express my gratitude at large for your obliging letter, is not more my duty than my interest, as some people will abundantly thank you for one piece of kindness, to put you in mind of bestowing another. The more favourable you are to me, the more distinctly I see my faults : spots and blemishes, you know, are never so plainly discovered as in the brightest sunshine. Thus I am mortified by those commendations which were designed to encourage me ; for praise to a young wit is like rain to a tender flower ; if it be moderately bestowed, it cheers and revives ; but if too lavishly, overcharges and depresses him. Most men in years, as they are generally discouragers of youth, are like old trees, that, being past bearing themselves, will suffer no young plants to flourish beneath them ; but, as if it were not enough to have out-

done all your coevals in wit, you will excel them in good-nature too. As for my green essays *, if you find any pleasure in them, it must be such as a man naturally takes in observing the first shoots and buddings of a tree which he has raised himself: and it is impossible they should be esteemed any otherwise than as we value fruits for being early, which nevertheless are the most insipid, and the worst of the year. In a word, I must blame you for treating me with so much compliment, which is at best but the smoke of friendship. I neither write nor converse with you to gain your praise, but your affection. Be so much my friend as to appear my enemy, and to tell me my faults, if not as a young man, at least as an inexperienced writer. I am, &c.

LETTER III.

MR. POPE TO MR. WYCHERLEY.

April 30, 1705.

I CANNOT contend with you: you must give me leave at once to wave all your compliments, and to collect only this in general from them, that your design is to encourage me: but I separate from all the rest that paragraph or two in which you make me so warm, an offer of your friendship. Were I possessed of that, it would put an end to all those speeches with which you now make me blush; and change them to wholesome advices

* His Pastorals, written at sixteen years of age.

and free sentiments, which might make me wiser and happier. I know it is the general opinion, that friendship is best contracted betwixt persons of equal age ; but I have so much interest to be of another mind, that you must pardon me if I cannot forbear telling you a few notions of mine, in opposition to that opinion.

In the first place, it is observable, that the love we bear to our friends is generally caused by our finding the same dispositions in them which we feel in ourselves. This is but self-love at the bottom : whereas the affection betwixt people of different ages cannot well be so, the inclinations of such being commonly various. The friendship of two young men is often occasioned by love of pleasure or voluptuousness, each being desirous for his own sake of one to assist or encourage him in the course he pursues ; as that of two old men is frequently on the score of some profit, lucre, or design upon others. Now, as a young man, who is less acquainted with the ways of the world, has in all probability less of interest ; and an old man, who may be weary of himself, has, or should have, less of self-love,—so the friendship between them is more likely to be true, and unmixed with too much self-regard. One may add to this, that such a friendship is of greater use and advantage to both ; for the old man will grow gay and agreeable to please the young one ; and the young man more discreet and prudent by the help of the old one ; so it may prove a cure of those epidemical diseases of age and youth, sourness and madness. I hope you will not need many arguments to convince you of the possibility of this ; one alone

abundantly satisfies me, and convinces to the heart ; which is, that young as I am, and old as you are *, I am your entirely affectionate, &c.



LETTER IV.

MR. POPE TO MR. WYCHERLEY.

Oct. 26, 1705.

I HAVE now changed the scene from the town to the country ; from Will's coffee-house to Windsor-forest. I find no other difference than this, betwixt the common town wits and the downright country fools ; that the first are pertly in the wrong, with a little more flourish and gaiety ; and the last neither in the right nor the wrong, but confirmed in a stupid settled medium betwixt both. However, methinks these are most in the right, who quietly and easily resign themselves over to the gentle reign of dulness, which the wits must do at last, though after a great deal of noise and resistance. Ours are a sort of modest inoffensive people, who neither have sense, nor pretend to any, but enjoy a jovial sort of dulness : they are commonly known in the world by the name of Honest, Civil Gentlemen : they live, much as they ride, at random ; a kind of hunting life, pursuing with earnestness and hazard something not worth the catching ; never in the way, nor out of it. I cannot but prefer solitude to the company of all these :

* Mr. Wytherley was at this time about seventy years old : Mr. Pope under seventeen.

for though a man's self may possibly be the worst fellow to converse with in the world, yet one would think the company of a person whom we have the greatest regard to and affection for, could not be very unpleasant. As a man in love with a mistress desires no conversation but hers, so a man in love with himself (as most men are) may be best pleased with his own. Besides, if the truest and most useful knowledge be the knowledge of ourselves, solitude, conducing most to make us look into ourselves, should be the most instructive state of life. We see nothing more commonly, than men who, for the sake of the circumstantial part and mere outside of life, have been half their days rambling out of their nature, and ought to be sent into solitude to study themselves over again. People are usually spoiled, instead of being taught at their coming into the world. whereas, by being more conversant with obscurity, without any pains, they would naturally follow what they are meant for. In a word, if a man be a coxcomb, solitude is his best school, and if he be a fool, it is his best sanctuary.

These are good reasons for my own stay here ; but I wish I could give you any for your coming hither, except that I earnestly invite you :—and yet I cannot help saying I have suffered a great deal of discontent that you do not come, though I so little merit that you should.

I must complain of the shortness of your last. Those who have most wit, like those who have most money, are generally most sparing of either.

LETTER V.

MR. POPE TO MR. WYCHERLEY.

April 10, 1706.

BY one of yours of the last month, you desire me to select, if possible, some things from the first volume of your *Miscellanies**, which may be altered so as to appear again. I doubted your meaning in this: whether it was to pick out the best of those verses (as those on the *Idleness of Business*, on *Ignorance*, on *Laziness*, &c.) to make the method and numbers exact, and avoid repetitions. For though (upon reading them on this occasion) I believe they might receive such an alteration with advantage, yet they would not be changed so much but any one would know them for the same at first sight. Or, if you mean to improve the worst pieces; which are such as, to render them very good, would require great addition, and almost the entire new writing of them. Or, lastly, if you mean the middle sort, as the *Songs* and *Love-verses*. For these will need only to be shortned, to omit repetition; the words remaining very little different from what they were before. Pray let me know your mind in this; for I am utterly at a loss. Yet I have tried what I could do to some of the songs, and the poems on *Laziness* and *Ignorance*; but cannot (even in my own partial judgment) think my alterations much

* Printed in folio, in the year 1704.

to the purpose : so that I must needs desire you would apply your care wholly at present to those which are yet unpublished, of which there are more than enough to make a considerable volume, of full as good ones ; nay, I believe of better than any in Vol. I, which I could wish you would defer, at least till you have finished these that are yet unprinted.

I send you a sample of some few of these ; namely, the verses to Mr. Waller in his old age ; your new ones on the duke of Marlborough, and two others. I have done all that I thought could be of advantage to them : some I have contracted, as we do sun-beams, to improve their energy and force : some I have taken quite away, as we take branches from a tree to add to the fruit ; others I have entirely new expressed, and turned more into poetry. Donne (like one of his successors) had infinitely more wit than he wanted versification : for the great dealers of wit, like those in trade, take least pains to set off their goods ; while the haberdashers of small wit spare for no decorations or ornaments. You have commissioned me to paint your shop ; and I have done my best to brush you up like your neighbours *. But I can no more pretend to the merit of the production, than a midwife to the virtues and good qualities of the child she helps into the light.

The few things I have entirely added, you will excuse ; you may take them lawfully for your own,

* Several of Mr. Pope's lines, very easy to be distinguished, may be found in the posthumous editions of Wycherley's Poems ; particularly those on Solitude, on the Public, and on the Mixed Life.

because they are no more than sparks lighted up by your fire: and you may omit them at last, if you think them but squibs in your triumphs. I am, &c.

LETTER VI.

MR. POPE TO MR. WYCHERLEY.

Nov. 29, 1707.

THE compliments you make me, in regard of any inconsiderable service I could do you, are very unkind; and do but tell me in other words, that my friend has no mean an opinion of me, as to think I expect acknowledgments for trifles: which, upon my faith, I shall equally take amiss, whether made to myself or to any other. For God's sake (my dear friend) think better of me; and believe I desire no sort of favour so much as that of serving you more considerably than I have yet been able to do.

I shall proceed in this manner with some others of your pieces: but since you desire I would not deface your copy for the future, and only mark the repetitions, I must, as soon as I have marked these, transcribe what is left on another paper; and in that blot, alter, and add all I can devise for their improvement; for you are sensible, the omission of repetitions is but one, and the easiest part of yours and my design; there remaining besides, to rectify the method, to connect the matter, and to mend the expression and versification. I will go next upon the poems of Solitude, on the Public,

and on the Mixed Life, the Bill of Fare, the Praises of Avarice, and some others.

I must take notice of what you say, of "my pains to make your dulness methodical;" and of your hint, "that the sprightliness of wit despises method." This is true enough, if by wit you mean no more than fancy or conceit; but in the better notion of wit, considered as propriety, surely method is, not only necessary for perspicuity and harmony of parts, but gives beauty even to the minute and particular thoughts, which receive an additional advantage from those which precede or follow in their due place. You remember a simile Mr. Dryden used in conversation, of feathers in the crowns of the wild Indians; which they not only choose for the beauty of their colours, but place them in such a manner as to reflect a lustre on each other. I will not disguise any of my sentiments from you: to methodize in your case, is full as necessary as to strike out; otherwise you had better destroy the whole frame, and reduce them into single thoughts in prose, like Rochefoucault, as I have more than once hinted to you.

LETTER VII.

MR. POPE TO MR. WALSH.

Windsor Forest, July 9, 1706.

I CANNOT omit the first opportunity of making you my acknowledgments for reviewing those papers of mine. You have no less right to correct me

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I have not attempted any thing of a pastoral comedy, because, I think, the taste of our age will not relish a poem of that sort. People seek for what they call wit, on all subjects, and in all places; not considering that Nature loves truth so well, that it hardly ever admits of flourishing: conceit is to nature, what paint is to beauty; it is not only needless, but impairs what it would improve. There is a certain majesty in simplicity, which is far above all the quaintness of wit: inso-much, that the critics have excluded wit from the loftiest poetry, as well as the lowest, and forbid it to the Epic no less than the pastoral. I should certainly displease all those who are charmed with Guarini and Bonarelli, and imitate Tasso not only in the simplicity of his thoughts, but in that of the fable too. If surprising discoveries should have place in the story of a pastoral comedy, I believe it would be more agreeable to probability to make

them the effects of chance than of design; ~~intrigue~~ not being very consistent with that innocence which ought to constitute a shepherd's character. There is nothing in all the *Aminta* (as I remember) but happens by mere accident; unless it be the meeting of *Aminta* with *Sylvia* at the fountain, which is the contrivance of *Daphne*; and even that is the most simple in the world: the contrary is observable in *Pastor Fido*, where *Corisca* is so perfect a mistress of intrigue, that the plot could not have been brought to pass without her. I am inclined to think the pastoral comedy has another disadvantage, as to the manners: its general design is to make us in love with the innocence of a rural life, so that to introduce shepherds of a vicious character must in some measure debase it; and hence it may come to pass, that even the virtuous characters will not shine so much, for want of being opposed to their contraries. These thoughts are purely my own, and therefore I have reason to doubt them; but I hope your judgment will set me right.

I would beg your opinion too as to another point: it is, How far the liberty of borrowing may extend? I have defended it sometimes by saying, that it seems not so much the perfection of sense, to say things that had never been said before, as to express those best that have been said oftenest; and that writers, in the case of borrowing from others, are like trees which of themselves would produce only one sort of fruit; but by being grafted upon others may yield variety. A mutual commerce makes poetry flourish; but then poets, like merchants, should repay with something of their

own what they take from others; not like pirates, to take prize of all they meet. I desire you tell me sincerely, if I have not stretched this licence too far in these Pastorals: I hope to become a critic by your precepts, and a poet by your example. Since I have seen your Eclogues, I cannot be much pleased with my own; however, you have not taken away all my vanity, so long as you give me leave to profess myself yours, &c.

LETTER VIII.

MR. POPE TO H. CROMWELL, ESQ.

March 18, 1708.

I BELIEVE it was with me when I left the town, as it is with a great many men when they leave the world, whose loss itself they do not so much regret, as that of their friends whom they leave behind in it. For I do not know one thing for which I can envy London, but for your continuing there. Yet I guess you will expect me to recant this expression, when I tell you that Sappho (by which heathenish name you have christened a very orthodox lady) did not accompany me into the country. Well, you have your lady in the town still, and I have my heart in the country still, which, being wholly unemployed as yet, has the more room in it for my friends, and does not want a corner at your service. You have extremely obliged me by your frankness and kindness; and if I have abused it by too much freedom on my part, I hope you

will attribute it to the natural openness of my temper, which hardly knows how to shew respect where it feels affection. I would love my friend, as my mistress, without ceremony; and hope a little rough usage sometimes may not be more displeasing to the one than it is to the other.

If you have any curiosity to know in what manner I live, or rather lose a life, Martial will inform you in one line :

Prandeo, poto, cano, ludo, ceno, quiesco.

Every day with me is literally another yesterday, for it is exactly the same : it has the same business, which is poetry ; and the same pleasure, which is idleness. A man might indeed pass his time much better, but I question if any man could pass it much easier. If you will visit our shades this spring, which I very much desire, you may perhaps instruct me to manage my game more wisely ; but at present I am satisfied to trifle away my time any way, rather than let it stick by me ; as shopkeepers are glad to be rid of those goods at any rate, which would otherwise always be lying upon their hands.

Sir, if you will favour me sometimes with ~~your~~ letters, it will be a great satisfaction to me on several accounts ; and on this in particular, that it will shew me (to my comfort) that even a wise man is sometimes very idle ; for so you needs must be, when you can find leisure to write to your, &c.

LETTER IX.

MR. POPE TO H. CROMWELL, ESQ.

April 17, 1708.

I HAVE nothing to say to you in this letter ; but I was resolved to write to tell you so. Why should not I content myself with so many great examples, of deep divines, profound casuists, grave philosophers ; who have written not letters only, but whole tomes and voluminous treatises about nothing ? Why should a fellow like me, who all his life does nothing, be ashamed to write nothing ; and that to one who has nothing to do but to read it ? But perhaps you will say, the whole world has something to do, something to talk of, something to wish for, something to be employed about : but pray, sir, cast up the account, put all these things together, and what is the sum total but just nothing ? I have no more to say, but to desire you to give my service (that is nothing) to your friends, and to believe that I am nothing more than your, &c.

“ Ex nihilo nil fit.” LUCR.

LETTER X.

FROM THE SAME TO THE SAME.

May 10, 1708.

You talk of fame and glory, and of the great men of antiquity : pray tell me, what are all your great dead men, but so many little living letters ? What

a vast reward is here for all the ink wasted by writers, and all the blood spilt by princes! There was in old times one Severus, a Roman emperor, I dare say you never called him by any other name in your life; and yet in his days he was styled Lucius, Septimius, Severus, Pius, Pertinax, Augustus, Parthicus, Adiabenicus, Arabicus, Maximus, and what not? What a prodigious waste of letters has time made! what a number have here dropped off, and left the poor surviving seven unattended! For my own part, four are all I have to care for; and I will be judged by you if any man could live in less compass! Well, for the future I will drown all high thoughts in the lethe of cowslip-wine; as for fame, renown, reputation, take them, critics!

*Tradam protervis in Mare Criticum
Ventis.*

If ever I seek for immortality here, may I be damned; for there is not so much danger in a poet's being damned:

*Damnation follows death in other men,
But your damn'd poet lives and writes again. —*

LETTER XI.

FROM THE SAME TO THE SAME.

Nov. 1, 1708.

I HAVE been so well satisfied with the country ever since I saw you, that I have not once thought of the town, nor inquired of any one in it besides

Mr. Wycherley and yourself: and from him I understand of your journey this summer into Leicestershire; from whence I guess you are returned, by this time, to your old apartment in the widow's corner, to your old business of comparing critics and reconciling commentators, and to your old diversions of losing a game at piquet with the ladies, and half a play, or quarter of a play at the theatre: where you are none of the malicious audience, but the chief of amorous spectators; and for the infirmity of one sense*, which there, for the most part, could only serve to disgust you, enjoy the vigour of another which ravishes you.

You know, when one sense is supprest,
It but retires into the rest,

according to the poetical, not the learned, Dodwell: who has done one thing worthy of eternal memory; wrote two lines in his life that are not nonsense! So you have the advantage of being entertained with all the beauty of the boxes, without being troubled with any of the dulness of the stage. You are so good a critic, that it is the greatest happiness of the modern poets that you do not hear their works; and next, that you are not so arrant a critic as to damn them (like the rest) without hearing. But now I talk of those critics, I have good news to tell you concerning myself, for which I expect you should congratulate with me: it is that, beyond all my expectations, and far above my demerits, I have been most mercifully reprieved by the sovereign power of Jacob Tonson, from

* His hearing.

being brought forth to public punishment; and respited from time to time from the hands of those barbarous executioners of the Muses, whom I was just now speaking of. It often happens, that guilty poets, like other guilty criminals, when once they are known and proclaimed, deliver themselves into the hands of justice, only to prevent others from doing it more to their disadvantage; and not out of any ambition to spread their fame, by being executed in the face of the world, which is a fame but of short continuance. That poet were a happy man who could but obtain a grant to preserve his for ninety-nine years: for those names very rarely last so many days, which are planted either in Jacob Tonson's, or the ordinary of Newgate's Miscellanies.

I have an hundred things to say to you, "which shall be deferred till I have the happiness of seeing you in town, for the season now draws on that invites every body thither. Some of them I had communicated to you by letters before this, if I had not been uncertain where you passed your time the last season; so much fine weather, I doubt not, has given you all the pleasure you could desire from the country, and your own thoughts the best company in it. But nothing could allure Mr. Wycherley to our forest, he continued (as you told me long since he would) an obstinate lover of the town, in spite of friendship and fair weather. Therefore, henceforward, to all those considerable qualities I know you possessed of, I shall add that of prophecy. But I still believe Mr. Wycherley's intentions were good, and am satisfied that he promises nothing but with a real design to perform it: how much

soever his other excellent qualities are above my imitation, his sincerity, I hope, is not; and it is with the utmost that I am, sir, &c.

LETTER XII.

MR. POPE TO H. CROMWELL, ESQ.

March 7, 1709.

You had long before this time been troubled with a letter from me, but that I deferred it till I could send you either the Miscellany*, or my continuation of the version of Statius. The first I imagined you might have had before now; but since the contrary has happened, you may draw this moral from it, that authors in general are more ready to write nonsense than booksellers are to publish it. I had I know not what extraordinary flux of rhyme upon me for three days together, in which time all the verses you see added have been written; which I tell you, that you may more freely be severe upon them. It is a mercy I do not assault you with a number of original sonnets and epigrams, which our modern bards put forth in the spring time, in as great abundance as ~~trees~~ ^{flowers} do blossoms, a very few whereof ever come to be fruit, and please no longer than just in their birth. They make no less haste to bring their flowers of wit to the press, than gardeners to bring their other flowers to the market,

* Jacob Tonson's sixth volume of Poetical Miscellanies, in which Mr. Pope's Pastorals, and some versions of Homer and Chaucer were first printed.

which if they cannot get off their hands in the morning are sure to die before night. Thus the same reason that furnishes Covent-garden with those nosegays you so delight in, supplies the Muses Mercury and British Apollo, (not to say Jacob's Miscellanies) with verses : and it is the happiness of this age, that the modern invention of printing poems for pence apiece, has brought the nosegays of Parnassus to bear the same price ; whereby the public-spirited Mr. Henry Hills, of Blackfriars, has been the cause of great ease and singular comfort to all the learned, who never over-abounding in transitory coin, should not be discontented (methinks) even though poems were distributed gratis about the streets, like Bunyan's sermons and other pious treatises, usually published in a like volume and character.

The time now drawing nigh, when you used with Sappho to cross the water in an evening to Spring-garden, I hope you will have a fair opportunity of ravishing her ;—I mean only (as Old Fox in the Plain Dealer says) through the ear, with your well-penned verses. I wish you all the pleasure which the season and the nymph can afford ; the best company, the best coffee, and the best news you can desire ; and what more to wish you than this, I do not know ; unless it be a great deal of patience to read and examine the verses I send you : I promise you in return a great deal of deference to your judgment, and an extraordinary obedience to your sentiments for the future (to which you know I have been sometimes a little refractory). If you will please to begin where you left off last, and mark the margin as you have done in the pages immediately before

(which you will find corrected to your sense since your last perusal), you will extremely oblige me and improve my translation. Besides those places which may deviate from the sense of the author, it would be very kind in you to observe any deficiencies in the diction or numbers. The hiatus in particular I would avoid as much as possible, to which you are certainly in the right to be a professed enemy ; though I confess, I could not think it possible at all times to be avoided by any writer, till I found by reading Malherbe lately, that there is scarce any throughout his poems. I thought your observation true enough to be passed into a rule, but not a rule without exceptions, nor that it ever had been reduced to practice ; but this example of one of the most correct and best of their poets has undeceived me, and confirms your opinion very strongly, and much more than Mr. Dryden's authority, who, though he made it a rule, seldom observed it. Your, &c.

LETTER XIII.

[MR. POPE TO. H. CROMWELL, ESQ.]

July 17, 1709.

THE morning after I parted from you, I found myself (as I had prophesied) all alone, in an uneasy stage-coach : a doleful change from that agreeable company I enjoyed the night before ! without the least hope of entertainment but from my lest recourse in such cases, a book. I then began to

enter into acquaintance with your moralists, and had just received from them some cold consolation for the inconveniences of this life, and the uncertainty of human affairs, when I perceived my vehicle to stop, and heard from the side of it the dreadful news of a sick woman preparing to enter it. It is not easy to guess at my mortification; but being so well fortified with philosophy, I stood resigned with a stoical constancy to endure the worst of evils, a sick woman. I was a little comforted to find, by her voice and dress, that she was young and a gentlewoman: but no sooner was her hood removed, but I saw one of the finest faces I ever beheld, and to increase my surprise, heard her salute me by my name. I never had more reason to accuse nature for making me short-sighted than now, when I could not recollect I had ever seen those fair eyes which knew me so well, and was utterly at a loss how to address myself; till with a great deal of simplicity and innocence she let me know (even before I discovered my ignorance) that she was the daughter of one in our neighbourhood lately married, who, having been consulting her physicians in town, was returning into the country, to try what good air and a husband could do to recover her. My father, you must know, has sometimes recommended the study of physic to me, but I never had any ambition to be a doctor till this instant. I ventured to prescribe some fruit (which I happened to have in the coach) which being forbidden her by her doctors, she had the more inclination to. In short, I tempted, and she ate; nor was I more like the Devil than she like Eve. Having the good success

of the foresaid tempter before my eyes, I put on the gallantry of the old serpent, and, in spite of my evil form, accosted her with all the gaiety I was master of; which had so good an effect, that in less than an hour she grew pleasant; her colour returned, and she was pleased to say my prescription had wrought an immediate cure. In a word, I had the pleasantest journey imaginable.

Thus far (methinks) my letter has something of the air of romance, though it be true. But I hope you will look on what follows as the greatest of truths, that I think myself extremely obliged by you in all points; especially for your kind and honourable information and advice in a matter of the utmost concern to me, which I shall ever acknowledge as the highest proof at once of your friendship, justice, and sincerity. At the same time be assured, that gentleman we spoke of shall never, by any alteration in me, discover my knowledge of his mistake; the hearty forgiving of which is the only kind return I can possibly make him for so many favours: and I may derive this pleasure at least from it, that whereas I must otherwise have been a little uneasy to know my incapacity of returning his obligations, I may now, by bearing his frailty, exercise my gratitude and friendship more than himself either is, or perhaps ever will be sensible of.

*Ille meos, primus qui se sibi junxit amores
Abstulit: ille habeat, regum servetque sepulchro!*

But in one thing, I must confess, you have yourself obliged me more than any man; which is, that you have showed me many of my faults, to which

as you are the more an implacable enemy, by so much the more are you a kind friend to me. I could be proud, in revenge, to find a few slips in your verses, which I read in London, and since in the country, with more application and pleasure : the thoughts are very just, and you are sure not to let them suffer by the versification. If you would oblige me with the trust of any thing of yours, I should be glad to execute any commissions you would give me concerning them. I am here so perfectly at leisure, that nothing would be so agreeable an entertainment to me ; but if you will not afford me that, do not deny me at least the satisfaction of your letters as long as we are absent, if you would not have him very unhappy, who is very sincerely yours, &c.

Having a vacant space here, I will fill it with a short Ode on Solitude, which I found yesterday by great accident, and which I find, by the date, was written when I was not twelve years old ; that you may perceive how long I have continued in my passion for a rural life, and in the same employments of it.

Happy the man, whose wish and care
A few paternal acres bound,
Content to breathe his native air
On his own ground.

Whose herds with milk, whose fields with bread,
Whose flocks supply him with attire,
Whose trees in summer yield him shade,
In winter fire.

Bless'd, who can unconcern'dly find
 Hours, days, and years slide soft away,
 In health of body, peace of mind,
 Quiet by day.

Sound sleep by night; study and ease
 Together mix'd; sweet recreation
 And innocence, which most does please,
 With meditation.

Thus let me live, unseen, unknown,
 Thus, unlamented, let me die,
 Steal from the world, and not a stone
 Tell where I lie.

LETTER XIV.

MR. POPE TO H. CROMWELL, ESQ.

Aug. 19, 1709.

IF I were to write to you as often as I think of you, my letters would be as bad as a rent-charge; but though the one be too little for your good nature, the other would be too much for your quiet, which is one blessing good-nature should indispensably receive from mankind in return from those many it gives. I have been informed of late, how much I am indebted to that quality of yours, in speaking well of me in my absence, the only thing by which you prove yourself no wit nor critic; though indeed I have often thought, that a friend will show just as much indulgence (and no more) to my faults when I am absent, as he does

severity to them when I am present. To be very frank with you, sir, I must own, that where I received so much civility at first, I could hardly have expected so much sincerity afterwards. But now I have only to wish, that the last were but equal to the first; and that as you have omitted nothing to oblige me, so you would omit nothing to improve me.

I caused an acquaintance of mine to inquire twice of your welfare, by whom I have been informed, that you have left your speculative angle in the widow's coffee-house, and bidding adieu for some time to all the rehearsals, reviews, gazettes, &c. have marched off into Lincolnshire. Thus I find you vary your life in the scene at least, though not in the action; for though life, for the most part, like an old play, be still the same, yet now and then a new scene may make it more entertaining. As for myself, I would not have my life a very regular play, let it be a good merry farce, a G—d's name, and a fig for the critical unities! For the generality of men, a true modern life is like a true modern play, neither tragedy, comedy, nor farce, nor one nor all of these; every actor is much better known by his having the same face than by keeping the same character: for we change our minds as often as they can their parts; and he who was yesterday Cæsar, is to-day sir John Daw. So that one might ask the same question of a modern life, that Rich did of a modern play: "Pray do me the favour, sir, to inform me,—Is this your tragedy or your comedy?"

I have dwelt the longer upon this, because I